

THE SECRET OF SOBRIENTE'S WELL

By BRET HARTE

Illustrated by WARWICK GOBLE.



blackened by sun and rain, and worn into mounds like ruins of masonry; there were the waterless ditches, like giant graves, and the pools of slumgullion, now dried into shining, glazed cement. There were two or three wooden "stores," from which the windows and doors had been taken and conveyed to the newer settlement of Wynyard's Gulch. Four or five buildings that still were inhabited — the blacksmith's shop, the post-office, a pioneer's cabin, and the old hotel and stage-office — only

accented the general desolation. The latter building had a remoteness of prosperity far beyond the others, having been a wayside Spanish-American *posada*, with adobe walls of two feet in thickness, that shamed the later shells of half-inch plank, which were slowly warping and cracking like dried pods in the oven-like heat.

The proprietor of this building, Colonel Swinger, had been looked upon by the community as a person quite as remote, old-fashioned and inconsistent with present progress, as the house itself. He was an old Virginian, who had emigrated from his decaying plantation on the James' River only to find the slaves, which he had brought with him, freed men when they touched Californian soil; to be driven by Northern progress and "smartness" out of the larger cities into the mountains, to fix himself at

EVEN to the eye of the most inexperienced traveller there was no doubt that Buena Vista was a "played out" mining camp. There, seamed and scarred by hydraulic engines, was the old hillside, over whose denuded surface the grass had begun to spring again in fitful patches; there were the abandoned heaps of tailings already

last, with the hopeless fatuity of his race, upon an already impoverished settlement; to sink his scant capital in hopeless shafts and ledges, and finally to take over the decaying hostelry of Buena Vista, with its desultory custom and few, lingering, impecunious guests. Here, too, his old Virginian ideas of hospitality were against his financial success; he could not dun nor turn from his door those unfortunate prospectors whom the ebbing fortunes of Buena Vista had left stranded by his side.

Coloner Swinger was sitting in a wicker-work rocking-chair on the verandah of his hotel—sipping a mint julep which he held in his hand, while he gazed into the dusty distance. Nothing could have convinced him that he was not performing a serious part of his duty as hotel-keeper in this attitude, even though there were no travellers expected, and the road at this hour of the day was deserted. On a bench at his side Larry Hawkins stretched his lazy length—one foot dropped on the verandah, and one arm occasionally groping under the bench for his own tumbler of refreshment. Apart from this community of occupation, there was apparently no interchange of sentiment between the pair. The silence had continued for some moments, when the Colonel put down his glass and gazed earnestly into the distance.

“Seein’ anything?” remarked the man on the bench, who had sleepily regarded him.

“No,” said the Colonel, “that is—it’s only Dick Ruggles crossin’ the road.”

“Thought you looked a little startled, ez ef you’d seen that ar wanderin’ stranger.”

“When I see that wandering stranger, sah,” said the Colonel decisively, “I won’t be sittin’ long in this yer chyar. I’ll let him know in about ten seconds that I don’t harbour any vagrants prowlin’ about like poor whites or free niggers on my property, sah!”

“All the same, I kinder wish ye did see him—for you’d be settled in *your* mind and I’d be easier in *mine*—ef you found out what he was doin’ round yer, or ye had to admit that it wasn’t no *livin’* man.”

“What do you mean?” said the Colonel, testily facing around in his chair.

His companion also altered his attitude by dropping his other foot to the floor, sitting up, and leaning lazily forward with his hands clasped.

“Look yer, Colonel. When you took this place I felt I didn’t have no call to tell ye all I know about it, nor to pizen yer mind

by any darned fool yarns I mout hev heard. Ye know it was one o’ them old Spanish *haciendas*?”

“I know,” said the Colonel loftily, “that it was held by a grant from Charles the Fifth of Spain, just as my property on the James’ River was given to my people by King James of England, sah!”

“That ez as may be,” returned his companion, in lazy indifference; “though I reckon that Char-les the Fifth of Spain and King James of England ain’t got much to do with what I’m goin’ to tell ye. Ye see, I was here long afore *your* time, or any of the boys that hev now cleared out; and at that time the *hacienda* belonged to a man named Juan Sobriente. He was that kind o’ fool that he took no stock in mining. When the boys were whoopin’ up the place and finding the colour everywhere, and there was a hundred men working down there in the gulch, he was either ridin’ round lookin’ up the wild horses he owned, or sitten’ with two or three lazy peons and Injins that was fed and looked arter by the priests. Gosh! now I think of it, it was mighty like *you* when you first kem here with your niggers. That’s curious, too, ain’t it?”

He had stopped, gazing with an odd, superstitious wonderment at the Colonel, as if overcome by this not very remarkable coincidence. The Colonel, overlooking or totally oblivious to its somewhat uncomplimentary significance, simply said, “Go on. What about him?”

“Well, ez I was sayin’, he warn’t in it nohow, but kept on his reg’lar way when the boom was the biggest. Some of the boys allowed it was mighty uncivil for him to stand off like that, and others—when he refused a big pile for his *hacienda* and the garden, that ran right into the gold-bearing ledge—war for lynching him and driving him outer the settlement. But as he had a pretty darter or niece livin’ with him, and, except for his partickler cussedness towards mining, was kinder peaceable and perlite, they thought better of it. Things went along like this, until one day the boys noticed—particklerly the boys that had slipped up on their luck—that old man Sobriente was gettin’ rich—had stocked a ranch over on the Divide, and had given some gold candlesticks to the mission church. That would have been only human nature and business, ef he’d had any during them flush times—but he hadn’t. This kinder puzzled them. They tackled the peons—his niggers—but it was all ‘No sabe.’ They tackled another

man—a kind of half-breed Kanaka, who, except the priest, was the only man who came to see him, and was supposed to be mighty sweet on the darter or niece—but they didn't get even the colour out *her*. Then the first thing we knowed was that old Sobriente was found dead in the well!"

"In the well, sah!" said the Colonel, starting up. "The well on my propahy?"

"No," said his companion. "The old well that was afterwards shut up. Yours was dug by the last tenant, Jack Raintree, who allowed that he didn't want to 'take any Sobriente in his reg'lar whisky and water.' Well, the half-breed Kanaka cleared out after the old man's death, and so did that darter or niece; and the Church, to whom old Sobriente had left this house, let it to Raintree for next to nothin'."

"I don't see what all that has got to do with that wandering tramp," said the Colonel, who was by no means pleased with this history of his property.

"I'll tell ye. A few days after Raintree took it over, he was lookin' round the garden, which old Sobriente had always kept shut up agin strangers, and he finds a lot of dried-up 'slumgullion'* scattered all about the borders and beds, just as if the old man had been using it for fertilising. Well, Raintree ain't no fool; he allowed the old man wasn't one, either; and he knew that slumgullion wasn't worth no more than mud for any good it would do the garden. So he put this yer together with Sobriente's good luck, and allowed to himself that the old *coyote* had been secretly gold-washin' all the while he seemed to be standin' off agin it! But where was the mine? Whar did he get the gold? That's what got Raintree. He hunted all over the garden, prospected every part of it—ye kin see the holes yet—but he never even got the colour!"

He paused, and then, as the Colonel made an impatient gesture, went on.

"Well, one night just afore you took the place, and when Raintree was gettin' just sick of it, he happened to be walkin' in the garden. He was puzzlin' his brain agin to know how old Sobriente made his pile, when all of a suddenst he saw suthin' a movin' in the brush beside the house. He calls out, thinkin' it was one of the boys, but got no answer. Then he goes to the bushes and a tall figger, all in black, starts out afore him. He couldn't see any face, for its head was covered with a hood—but he saw that it

held suthin' like a big cross clasped agin its breast. This made him think it was one o' them priests, until he looks agin and sees that it wasn't no cross it was carryin'—but a *pickaxe*! He makes a jump towards it, but it vanished! He trapsed over the hull garden—went through ev'ry bush—but it was clean gone. Then the hull thing flashed upon him with a cold shiver. The old man bein' found dead in the well! the goin' away of the half-breed and the girl! the findin' o' that slumgullion! The old man *had* made a strike in that garden, the half-breed had discovered his secret and murdered him, throwin' him down the well! It war no *livin'* man that he had seen—but the ghost of old Sobriente!"

The Colonel emptied the remaining contents of his glass at a single gulp and sat up. "It's my opinion, sah, that Raintree had that night more than his usual allowance of corn-juice on board—and it's only a wonder, sah, that he didn't see a few pink alligators and sky-blue snakes at the same time. But what's this got to do with that wanderin' tramp?"

"They're all the same thing, Colonel—and in my opinion that there tramp ain't no more alive than that figger was."

"But *you* were the one that saw this tramp with your own eyes," retorted the Colonel quickly, "and you never before allowed it was a spirit!"

"Exactly! I saw it whar a minit afore nothin' had been standin', and a minit after nothin' stood," said Larry Hawkins, with a certain serious emphasis; "but I warn't goin' to say it to *anybody*, and I warn't goin' to give you and the *hacienda* away. And ez nobody knew Raintree's story, I jest shut up my head. But you kin bet your life that the man I saw warn't no livin' man!"

"We'll see, sah!" said the Colonel, rising from his chair with his fingers in the arm-holes of his nankeen waistcoat, "ef he ever intrudes on my property again. But look yar! don't ye go sayin' anything of this to Polly—you know what women are!"

A faint colour came into Larry's face; an animation quite different to the lazy deliberation of his previous monologue shone in his eyes, as he said, with a certain rough respect he had not shown before to his companion, "That's why I'm tellin' ye, so that ef *she* happened to see anything and got skeert, ye'd know how to reason her out of it."

"Sh!" said the Colonel, with a warning gesture.

A young girl had just appeared in the

* *i.e.*, a viscid cement-like refuse of gold-washing.

doorway, and now stood leaning against the central pillar that supported it, with one hand above her head in a lazy attitude strongly suggestive of the Colonel's southern indolence, yet with a grace entirely her own. Indeed, it overcame the negligence of her creased and faded yellow cotton frock and unbuttoned collar, and suggested—at least to the eyes of *one* man—the curving and clinging of the jasmine vine against the outer column of the verandah. Larry Hawkins rose awkwardly to his feet.

“Now what are you two men mumblin’ and confiding to each other? You look for all the world like two old women gossips,” she said with languid impertinence.

It was easy to see that a privileged and recognised autocrat spoke. No one had ever questioned Polly Swinger's right to interrupting, interfering, and saucy criticisms. Secure in the hopeless or chivalrous admiration of the men around her, she had repaid it with a frankness that scorned any coquetry; with an indifference to the ordinary feminine effect or provocation in dress or bearing that was as natural as it was invincible. No one had ever known Polly to “fix up” for anybody, yet no one ever doubted the effect, if she had. No one had ever rebuked her charming petulance, or wished to.

Larry gave a weak, vague laugh. Colonel Swinger as ineffectively assumed a mock parental severity. “When you see two gentlemen, miss, discussin’ politics together, it ain’t behavin’ like a lady to interrupt. Better run away and tidy yourself before the stage comes.”

The young lady replied to the last innuendo by taking two spirals of soft hair, like “corn silk,” from her oval cheek, wetting them with her lips, and tucking them behind her ears. Her father's ungentlemanly suggestion

being thus disposed of she returned to her first charge.

“It ain’t no politics; you ain’t been swearing enough for *that!* Come now! It’s the mysterious stranger ye’ve been talking about!”

Both men stared at her with unaffected concern.



“‘It ain’t no politics.’”

“What do *you* know about any mysterious stranger?” demanded her father.

“Do you suppose you men kin keep a secret,” scoffed Polly. “Why, Dick Ruggles told me how skeert ye all were over an entire stranger—and he advised me not to wander down the road after dark. I asked him if he thought I was a pickaninny to be frightened by bogies, and that if he hadn’t

a better excuse for wantin' 'to see me home' from the Injin spring, he might slide."

Larry laughed again, albeit a little bitterly, for it seemed to him that the excuse was fully justified; but the Colonel said promptly, "Dick's a fool, and you might have told him there were worse things to be met on the road than bogies. Run away now, and see that the niggers are on hand when the stage comes."

Two hours later the stage came with a clatter of hoofs and a cloud of red dust, which precipitated itself and a dozen thirsty travellers upon the verandah before the hotel bar-room; it brought also the usual "express" newspapers and much talk to Colonel Swinger—who always received his guests in a lofty personal fashion at the door as he might have done in his old Virginian home; but it brought likewise—marvellous to relate—an *actual guest* who had two trunks and asked for a room! He was evidently a stranger to the ways of Buena Vista, and particularly to those of Colonel Swinger, and at first seemed inclined to resent the social attitude of his host, and his frank and free curiosity. When he, however, found that Colonel Swinger was even better satisfied to give an account of *his own* affairs, his family, pedigree and his present residence, he began to betray some interest. The Colonel told him all the news, and would no doubt have even expatiated on his ghostly visitant had he not prudently concluded that his guest might decline to remain in a haunted inn. The stranger had spoken of staying a week; he had some private mining speculations to watch at Wynyard's Gulch—the next settlement, but he did not care to appear openly at the "Gulch Hotel." He was a man of thirty, with soft, pleasing features and a singular litheness of movement, which, combined with a nut-brown, gipsy complexion, at first suggested a foreigner. But his dialect, to the Colonel's ears, was distinctively that of New England, and to this was added a puritanical and sanctimonious drawl. "He looked," said the Colonel in after years, "like a blank light mulatter, but talked like a blank Yankee parson." For all that, he was acceptable to his host, who may have felt that his reminiscences of his plantation on the James' River were palling on Buena Vista ears, and was glad of this new auditor. It was an advertisement, too, of the hotel and a promise of its future fortunes. "Gentlemen having propahy interests at the Gulch, sah, prefer to stay at Buena Vista with another

man of propahy, than to trust to those new-fangled, papah-collared, gingerbread booths for traders that they call 'hotels' there," he had remarked to some of "the boys." In his preoccupation with the new guest he also became a little neglectful of his old chum and dependent, Larry Hawkins. Nor was this the only circumstance that filled the head of that shiftless loyal retainer of the Colonel's with bitterness and foreboding. Polly Swinger—the scornfully indifferent, the contemptuously inaccessible, the coldly capricious and petulant—was inclined to be polite to the stranger!

The fact was that Polly, after the fashion of her sex, took it into her pretty head, against all consistency and logic, suddenly to make an exception to her general attitude toward mankind in favour of one individual. The reason-seeking masculine reader will rashly conclude that this individual was the *cause* as well as the object; but I am satisfied that every fair reader of these pages will instinctively know better. Miss Polly had simply selected the new guest, Mr. Starbuck, to show *others*, particularly Larry Hawkins, what she *could* do if she were inclined to be civil. For two days she "fixed up" her distracting hair at him so that its silken floss encircled her head like a nimbus; she tucked her oval chin into a white *fichu* instead of a buttonless collar; she appeared at dinner in a newly starched yellow frock! She talked to him with "company manners"; said she would "admire to go to San Francisco," and asked if he knew her old friends the Fauquier girls from "Fagina." The Colonel was somewhat disturbed; he was glad that his daughter had become less negligent of her personal appearance; he could not but see, with the others, how it enhanced her graces; but he was, with the others, not entirely satisfied with her reasons. And he could not help observing—what was more or less patent to *all*—that Starbuck was far from being equally responsive to her attentions, and at times was indifferent and almost uncivil. Nobody seemed to be satisfied with Polly's transformation but herself.

But eventually she was obliged to assert herself. The third evening after Starbuck's arrival she was going over to the cabin of Aunt Chloe, who not only did the washing for Buena Vista, but assisted Polly in dress-making. It was not far, and the night was moonlit. As she crossed the garden she saw Starbuck moving in the manzanita bushes beyond; a mischievous light came

into her eyes; she had not *expected* to meet him, but she had seen him go out, and there were always *possibilities*. To her surprise, however, he merely lifted his hat as she passed, and turned abruptly in another direction. This was more than the little heart-breaker of Buena Vista was accustomed to!

"Oh, Mister Starbuck!" she called in her laziest voice.

He turned almost impatiently.

"Since you're so civil and pressing, I thought I'd tell you I was just runnin' over to Aunt Chloe's," she said drily.

"I should think it was hardly the proper thing for a young lady to do at this time of night," he said superciliously. "But you know best—you know the people here."

Polly's cheeks and eyes flamed. "Yes, I reckon I do," she said crisply; "it's only a *stranger* here would think of being rude. Good-night, Mr. Starbuck!"

She tripped away after this Parthian shot, yet feeling, even in her triumph, that the conceited fool seemed actually relieved at her departure! And for the first time she now thought she had seen something in his face that she did not like! But her lazy independence reasserted itself soon, and half an hour later, when she had left Aunt Chloe's cabin, she had regained her self-esteem. Yet, to avoid meeting him again, she took a longer route home, across the dried ditch and over the bluff, scarred by hydraulics, and so fell, presently, upon the old garden at the point where it adjoined the abandoned diggings. She was quite sure she had escaped a meeting with Starbuck, and was gliding along under the shadow of the pear trees when she suddenly stopped. An indescribable terror overcame her as she stared at a spot in the garden, perfectly illuminated by the moonlight not fifty yards from where she stood. For she saw on its surface a human head—a man's head!—seemingly on the level of the ground, staring in her direction. A hysterical laugh sprang from her lips, and she caught at the branches above her or she would have fallen! Yet in that moment the head had vanished! The moonlight revealed the empty garden—the ground she had gazed at—but nothing more!

She had never been superstitious. As a child she had heard the negroes talk of "the hants"—*i.e.*, "the *haunts*" or spirits—but had believed it a part of their ignorance, and unworthy a white child—the daughter of their master! She had laughed with

Dick Ruggles over the illusions of Larry, and had shared her father's contemptuous disbelief of the wandering visitant being anything but a living man; yet she would have screamed for assistance now, only for the greater fear of making her weakness known to Mr. Starbuck, and being dependent upon him for help. And with it came the sudden conviction that *he* had seen this awful vision, too. This would account for his impatience of her presence and his rudeness. She felt faint and giddy. Yet, after the first shock had passed, her old independence and pride came to her relief. She would go to the spot and examine it. If it were some trick or illusion, she would show her superiority and have the laugh on Starbuck. She set her white teeth, clenched her little hands, and started out into the moonlight. But alas! for women's weakness. The next moment she uttered a scream and almost fell into the arms of Mr. Starbuck, who had stepped out of the shadows beside her.

"So you see you *have* been frightened," he said, with a strange, forced laugh; "but I warned you about going out alone!"

Even in her fright she could not help seeing that he, too, seemed pale and agitated, at which she recovered her tongue and her self-possession.

"Anybody would be frightened by being dogged about under the trees," she said pertly.

"But you called out before you saw me," he said bluntly, "as if something had frightened you. That was *why* I came towards you."

She knew it was the truth—but as she would not confess to her vision she fibbed outrageously.

"Frightened," she said, with pale but lofty indignation. "What was there to frighten me? I'm not a baby, to think I see a bogie in the dark!" This was said in the faint hope that *he* had seen something, too. If it had been Larry or her father who had met her, she would have confessed everything.

"You had better go in," he said curtly. "I will see you safe inside the house."

She demurred at this, but as she could not persist in her first bold intention of examining the locality of the vision without admitting its existence, she permitted him to walk with her to the house, and then at once fled to her own room. Larry and her father noticed their entrance together and their agitated manner, and were uneasy. Yet the Colonel's paternal pride and Larry's lover's

respect, kept the two men from communicating their thoughts to each other.

"The confounded pup has been tryin' to be familiar, and Polly's set him down," thought Larry, with glowing satisfaction.

"He's been trying some of his sanctimonious, Yankee, abolition talk on Polly, and

belief and speculations, but she would not trust a nigger with what she couldn't tell her own father. For Polly really and truly believed that she had seen a ghost, no doubt the ghost of the murdered Sobriente, according to Larry's story. *Why* he should appear with only his head above ground puzzled



"A man's head staring in her direction."

she's shocked him!" thought the Colonel exultingly.

But poor Polly had other things to think of in the silence of her room. Another woman would have unburdened herself to a confidante; but Polly was too loyal to her father to shatter his beliefs, and too high-spirited to take another and a lesser person into her confidence. She was certain that Aunt Chloe would be full of sympathetic

her—although it suggested the Catholic idea of purgatory—and he was a Catholic! Perhaps he would have risen entirely but for that stupid Starbuck's presence—perhaps he had a message for *her* alone. The idea pleased Polly, albeit it was a "fearful joy" and attended with some cold shivering. Naturally, as a gentleman, he would appear to *her*—the daughter of a gentleman—the successor to his house—rather than to a

Yankee stranger. What was she to do? For once her calm nerves were strangely thrilled; she could not think of undressing and going to bed, and two o'clock surprised her, still meditating and occasionally peeping from her window upon the moonlit but vacant garden. If she saw him again, would she dare to go down alone? Suddenly she started to her feet with a beating heart! There was the unmistakable sound of a stealthy footstep in the passage, coming towards her room. Was it he? In spite of her high resolves she felt that if the door opened she should scream! She held her breath—the footsteps came nearer—were before her door—and *passed!*

Then it was that the blood rushed back to her cheek with a flush of indignation. Her room was at the end of the passage—there was nothing beyond but a private staircase, long disused, except by herself, as a short cut through the old *patio* to the garden. No one else knew of it, and no one else had the right of access to it! This insolent human intrusion—as she was satisfied it was now—overcame her fear, and she glided to the door. Opening it softly, she could hear the stealthy footsteps descending. She darted back, threw a shawl over her head and shoulders, and taking the small Derringer pistol—which it had always been part of her ostentatious independence to place at her bed-head—she as stealthily followed the intruder. But the footsteps had died away before she reached the *patio*, and she saw only the small deserted, grass-grown courtyard, half hidden in shadows—in whose centre stood the fateful and long sealed-up well! A shudder came over her at again being brought into contact with the cause of her frightful vision, but as her eyes became accustomed to the darkness she saw something more real and appalling! The well was no longer sealed! Fragments of bricks and boards lay around it! one end of a rope, coiled around it like a huge snake, descended its foul depths—and as she gazed with staring eyes, the head and shoulders of a man emerged slowly from it! But it was *not* the ghostly apparition of last evening, and her terror changed to scorn and indignation as she recognised the face of Starbuck!

Their eyes met, an oath broke from his lips. He made a movement to spring from the well, but as the girl started back the pistol held in her hand was discharged aimlessly in the air and the report echoed throughout the courtyard. With a curse Starbuck drew back, instantly disappeared in

the well, and Polly fell fainting on the steps. When she came to, her father and Larry were at her side. They had been alarmed at the report and had rushed quickly to the *patio*, but not in time to prevent the escape of Starbuck and his accomplice. By the time she had recovered her consciousness, they had learned the full extent of that extraordinary revelation which she had so innocently precipitated. Sobriente's well had really concealed a rich gold ledge—actually tunnelled and galleried by him, secretly in the past—and its only other outlet was an opening in the garden hidden by a stone which turned on a swivel. Its existence had been unknown to Sobriente's successor, but was known to the Kanaka who had worked with Sobriente, who fled with his daughter after the murder, but who no doubt was afraid to return and work the mine. He had imparted the secret to Starbuck, another half-breed, son of a Yankee missionary and Hawaiian wife, who had evidently conceived this plan of seeking Buena Vista with an accomplice, and secretly removing such gold as was still accessible. The accomplice—afterwards identified by Larry as the wandering tramp—failed to discover the secret entrance *from* the garden, and Starbuck was consequently obliged to attempt it from the hotel—for which purpose he had introduced himself as a boarder—by opening the disused well secretly at night. These facts were obtained from papers found in the otherwise valueless trunks, weighted with stones for ballast, which Starbuck had brought to the hotel to take away his stolen treasure in, but which he was obliged to leave in his hurried flight. The attempt would have doubtless succeeded but for Polly's courageous and timely interference!

And now that they had told her *all*, they only wanted to know what had first excited *her* suspicions, and driven her to seek the well as the object of Starbuck's machinations? *They* had noticed her manner when she entered the house that night, and Starbuck's evident annoyance. Had she taxed him with her suspicions, and so discovered a clue?

It was a terrible temptation to Polly to pose as a more perfect heroine, and one may not blame her if she did not rise entirely superior to it. Her previous belief, that the head of the accomplice at the opening of the garden was that of a *ghost*, she now felt was certainly in the way, as was also her conduct to Starbuck, whom she believed to be equally



"He made a movement to spring from the well."

frightened, and whom she never once suspected! So she said, with a certain lofty simplicity, that there were *some things* which she really did not care to talk about, and Larry and her father left her that night with the firm conviction that the rascal Starbuck had tried to tempt her to fly with him and his riches, and had been crushingly foiled. Polly never denied this, and once, in later days, when admiringly taxed with it by Larry, she admitted with dove-like simplicity that she *may* have been too foolishly polite to her father's guest for the sake of her father's hotel.

However, all this was of small account to the thrilling news of a new discovery and working of the "old gold ledge" at Buena Vista! As the three kept their secret from the world the discovery was accepted in the neighbourhood as the result of careful examination and prospecting on the part of Colonel Swinger and his partner Larry Hawkins. And when the latter gentleman afterwards boldly proposed to Polly Swinger, she mischievously declared that she accepted him only that the secret might not go "out of the family."

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